

Historic and Literary Miscellany.

By G. M. D. Bloss, Cincinnati.
Robert Clarke & Co.

Through the kindness of the author we have received advance sheets of this work. As a journalist Mr. Bloss has long enjoyed a reputation second to none in the West. As a miscellaneous writer he displays an ease and readiness that alone would insure popularity. His productions are never of that elaborate sort that "smell of the lamp," while at the same time they are the result of profound thought and careful preparation. His style is at once smooth, graceful and vigorous, and his language is ever characterized by an elegant simplicity suited to the most ordinary understanding. His eminent scholarly attainments are visible through all his writings, which are thus adorned in a manner to be admired by the learned and appreciated by the most illiterate.

We are well pleased that Mr. Bloss has at length decided to give to the public a work like the present. It fills a desideratum that has long existed in American literature. It is handsomely published and forms a volume of nearly five hundred pages. The collection comprised in it is, in every way, a most judicious one. It contains some of his ablest efforts, such as in the columns of a newspaper or magazine would be most widely read. The great variety of subjects discussed, party politics, however, being severely ignored, gives it almost an encyclopedic character, and not an article in it but, in our opinion, will be found both entertaining and instructive. It is precisely what the popular mind needs, and we would cordially recommend it to every one in search of pleasant and profitable reading, and predict for it the success which it assuredly deserves.

To give a better idea of its contents we will here insert a few extracts. Under the title, "The Proximity of Modern Authors," we find the following very sensible remarks:

"The great, yes, the fatal defect of the literature of this age, particularly in the United States, is its extreme prolixity and verbosity. Its compositions in every department of thought are swollen to an almost interminable length. The finest mental jewels are buried in the wordy carapaces in which they are placed. Even if our literature in other respects was deserving of perpetuation, of going down to be admired by posterity, its immense proportions would prevent it. If human lives were of the length of the antediluvian period, they would not suffice to make men acquainted with the ponderous tomes and overwhelming folios in which the learning of the nineteenth century is embedded. We are, to use the expressive phrase of Carlyle, literally going to 'wind and tongue.' One is almost inclined to think it would be a blessing if the words in the English language would of their own accord, in order to drive writers into condensation and talkers into brevity. We have often thought of what would be the probable length of works of the scope of 'Hume's History of England,' or 'Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' if they were to be undertaken by modern historians of the school of Bancroft, Thiers or Motley."

In "Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer" we have an elegant mental portrait of that great author:

"In the long line of British authors, from the time of Chaucer and Spenser down to Dickens, there are few names which have left behind them such memorials of greatness, associated with such contemporary popularity as Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer. We call him by the appellation under which he won his laurels of fame rather than that which, by assuming, he obtained pecuniary fortune. Many of today can recall the fervent burst of enthusiastic admiration with which the advent of the author of 'Pelham' was received in the domain of fiction by all those who read and speak the English language. He was the legitimate successor of Sir Walter Scott, and in some respects he even excelled that immortal writer. In the magnificence of his diction, in the extraordinary sublimity in which he clothed his brilliant imagination, where, indeed, he had a rival? He is the Byron of prose. There are some points of resemblance in the character and lives of these children of genius. Both belonged to the higher classes of society and represented noble houses. Both united the generally opposite and antagonistic roles of men of the world and men of letters. In the latter, the same glowing and sparkling eloquence, and in their thoughts the same disregard of what was considered the moral and religious sentiment of the world."

And in another article a splendid tribute is paid to the genius of one greater still:

"Sir Walter Scott may be considered as the founder of the school of modern novelists, and no one since has begun to equal him in it. His superiority arose partly in this, that he had no successor or predecessor who so faithfully portrayed the manners and customs and incidents of a particular epoch. It was Lord Brougham, we believe, who said that there was more genuine history to be found in the Waverley Novels than any other professed history that had been written. In his multitude of works he has illustrated the days of the Crusades, of chivalry, and of the English civil wars in so weird and interesting a manner as to leave an enduring impression upon all who have perused them. As a mere story-teller he was unequalled. His plots are absolutely insurmountable and never develop until the close of his work; and yet they are founded upon the simplest materials. His powers of description are absolutely marvelous. We don't think the English language affords anything more wonderful than the account of the entrance of Queen Elizabeth into the Castle of Knottburgh, in the novel of that name, and yet in all his works we find many other passages that are equally worthy of it. He was not only the portrayeur of scenes in high, but lowly life. Where shall we find a more interesting and excellent character than 'Jennie Deane,' the daughter of the Scotch peasant in the 'Heart of Mid Lothian? He not only wrote the best prose, but some of the best poetry of his age, and that age was the age of Byron, Wordsworth, Southey, Rogers, Moore and Goethe. Through all his works we see the mixed character of the historian, the poet, the lawyer, and the antiquarian, and the dramatic and the satirical and sagacious reflections of the man of the world."

In a different vein the writer gives us some very agreeable "New Year Reflections."

We are now fairly embarked in a new ship on the sea of life. Everything about her is entirely new—hull, spar,

and rigging, from the keel to the topmast. Most of us sail toward the unknown future. The ocean that we are to cross is not of great width, but it is perilous, and full of difficulties to the mariner. Ignoring that thought, with light and cheerful hearts, with buoyant spirits and anticipations, we offer our friends on the ship cordial greetings and hearty wishes for a prosperous voyage. As we bid adieu to the place of our embarkation, we can not but remember that many of our friends who were with us on the last trip, who were then gay and joyous, the delight of all on board, are not now present. They have been left behind on those shores to which we shall never return, and from which we are now steadily receding. Grand, however, is the idea that we are sailing toward a place where we shall meet the past; where it and the present are swallowed up in one immense and eternal future.

Let us remember, as we are now starting on a new voyage, the experiences of past years, and profit by them. Whatsoever makes the past or the future have its influence over the present, is worthy of special regard and cultivation. We ought, as reasoning beings, taught by experience, to shun many dangers whose proximity we now know. We ought to cultivate those virtues and those qualities which enable us to resolutely face dangers and endure privations which no amount of calculation will suffice to overcome. Courage, patience, self-denial, and perseverance will conquer almost everything we meet that is conquerable in nature—as charity, humanity, and generosity in practice will better fit us to the realms to which we are advancing. Hail then, on this morning of the New Year, the future, around which plays the light of hope and glorious anticipation; and may we, as we progress toward it, find the reality exceeds all that the wildest imagination has dreamed of.

"The Haughty Attitude of Germany" is thus well described:

In a single decade the old balance of power which used to exist in Europe has entirely disappeared. France is completely isolated. Great Britain has voluntarily retreated from European complications, and retired behind the waves that lash her rocky shores. Austria is cowed and thoroughly humbled. Only Russia remains to dispute her supremacy, and she can not raise, for a decisive campaign, as many men as Germany, although she has double her population. A decree from Berlin would send a host of soldiers to the front, as Napoleon I ever was. His arbitrary seizure and imprisonment of so important a personage as Count Von Arnim reminds us of the kidnapping of the Duke D'Enghien, by his French prototype.

To all intents and purposes, the German power is now so securely entrenched behind its millions of bayonets, that it would require a great European coalition to establish the old order of things.

Under the title "The Drama, the Stage, and the Pulpit," are some very truthful and forcible comments, as follows:

The world has undergone every sort of change in the character of its amusements. We do not need a mirror, as it were, of our time. It is in vogue now. It was in vogue three thousand years ago, and it will be in vogue as long as time shall last. It is so because it combines amusement with instruction. It diverts, it absorbs, it entrances, and at the same time conveys most useful lessons. We do not know whether the puppet itself has been a greater instrumentality to create a detestation of vice and a love of virtue than the stage. Even an audience of the roughest character, in listening to the drama, in following the threads of its connection, instinctively breaks out with applause at the utterance of noble sentiments, or is thrilled with emotion at the performance of a heroic and generous act. The spectators love to see hypocrisy unmasked and fidelity rewarded. Therefore is it that men go away from a theater where the genuine drama has been played elevated and improved, if they are susceptible to such influences. The theater has been a way of public taste and public virtue. As the people deteriorate in morality, the stage degenerates in respectability.

The stage needs reformation in its present management; but we must reform, we fear, the people and render them more virtuous before any good can be effected. As long as thousands flock to see the "Black Crook," to where hundreds will listen to the most sublime renditions of our greatest dramas by our most brilliant actors and actresses, it is not to be expected that theater managers, in this money-worshipping age, will forego the opportunity and sacrifice profit to principle.

The Irish peasantry have tales of a parabolic character—stories which, by means of some striking action or circumstance, set forth a hearty moral. On hearing such, their usual phrase is, "Och, it is mighty improvin'!" And that, too, is what Molly Malone, a worthy washer-woman, used to say—and say almost daily, being a hearty sermon on Sunday. One day, however, her clergyman, who was not quite content with this generalization, spoke to her respecting his discourse, and Molly suddenly became what they call in Ireland a little bothered. Nevertheless, she got out of her difficulty with one of those parabolic answers which are such favorites with the Irish, and which, while they completely evade the question, satisfactorily replied to it.

Rev.—Well, Molly, you liked the sermon, you say?

Mol.—O, yes, your reverence—it was mighty improvin'.

Rev.—And what part of it did you like best?

Mol.—Well, sure, sir, I liked every part.

Rev.—But I suppose there was some portions of it that you were more struck with than you were with others?

Mol.—In troth, please your reverence, I don't remember any part exactly, but altogether 'twas mighty improvin'.

Rev.—Now, Molly, how could it be improving if you don't remember any part of it?

Mol.—Well, your reverence, since that linen I've been washing and darning on the hedge there?

Rev.—Oh, certainly.

Mol.—Wasn't it the soap and water made the linen clean, sir?

Rev.—Of course they did.

Mol.—And isn't the linen all the better for it?

Rev.—Oh, no doubt of that, Molly.

Mol.—But not a drop of the soap and water stays in it. Well, sir, it's the same thing with me. Not a word of the sermon stays in me—I know it all, but I don't remember it, when it's over, for all that.—Memoirs of Samuel Lover.

The London Spectator says: "You'll remember 'The Silken Song' in the language, and 'Good-by, sweetheart,' the second silliest. Either the Spectator never heard 'Darling, I'm growing old,' or its perception of silliness partakes so largely of that quality as to be valueless.—Inter-Ocean.

English Railway Co.

Since the Baker trial Englishmen have begun to wonder whether it isn't about time for England to adopt the American system of cars, whereby such crimes are impossible. European railway carriages are the stupidest, most uncomfortable and most inconvenient of conceivable conveyances. You can be burned, murdered, robbed, assaulted, with perfect ease. You are stifled in summer and frozen to death in winter. There are no retiring rooms, and every train is detained at some way-station in order that the tickets may be collected. Then you can't read with any comfort, because the carriages, being short and light, jump about as though afflicted with St. Vitus' dance. A chronic growl possesses the American traveler the moment he sees an English railway carriage, and if Col. Baker's conduct helps to open British eyes to the necessity of a radical change, his exposure will become a cause of national thanksgiving.

The Carlist.

News from Madrid must generally be taken with "a grain of salt," but there is no reason to doubt that the prospects of the Carlist cause are well nigh as gloomy as they are painted by the enemies of Carlism. Don Carlos is in full retreat before the forces of the Madrid government, his own bands reduced to a mere handful. Catalonia is on the point of being pacified, and the government has resolved to make a serious effort to capture Estella. History is repeating itself. The hardy mountaineers of the four northern provinces have exhausted themselves in the effort to impose their will on Spain, and now the moment has come when they must abandon the fight or be exterminated. In continuing a hopeless struggle Don Carlos displays a selfishness and indifference to the well-being of his friends that ought to disgust them with "divine right of kings," and no doubt would, were it not for the religious fanaticism which is the prop of the Carlist cause.—N. Y. Herald.

Why It Has Failed.

Recently arrived steamers, says the New York Herald, report that the Atlantic is full of ice, and this explains the mystery of the incessant rains from which the Eastern seaboard, and indeed the whole country, has been suffering more weeks than it is pleasant to think of. It is probable that there has been a mild winter and early spring in the Arctic regions. This has caused open waters, which have borne into the Atlantic an uncommon quantity of ice. This great mass of ice, drifting into lower latitudes, is rapidly melting, and the vapors arising from it are drawn to the land and yield us the too abundant rain storms which have caused floods and more or less injury to crops. The melting of the ice has also more freely boats and carries the air upon it, and the vapors arising from the melted ice rush in to fill up the vacuum thus constantly created by the summer heat.

Stock Pays All the Time.

The heading of this article, says the Valley Farmer, was the remark of an old farmer the other day while deplored the failure of the stock crop. "One year the wheat fails, another year the oats fail, another year the corn; but," says he, "stock pays all the time." He moreover, remarked, that the farmers who early gave their attention to stock raising, had gone right along without setbacks and outstripped the grain growers. There is, no doubt, much truth in the old man's remark. Stock is the safest and most remunerative. But in thickly settled regions it is better and safer to divide the interest between the two.

The two assist each other and improve the farm. Waste straw and offal of the stock will go to fertilizing the soil and improving its capacity for productive purposes. The stirring of the soil is a great desideratum with the farmer. The soil is the mine of wealth—his treasury—his bank of deposit. He must keep it good, or his paper is protested—his reputation as a farmer is discredited. It is well to keep a variety of stock, as well as to raise a variety of grain crops. The general profits of each year are thus kept nearly equal.

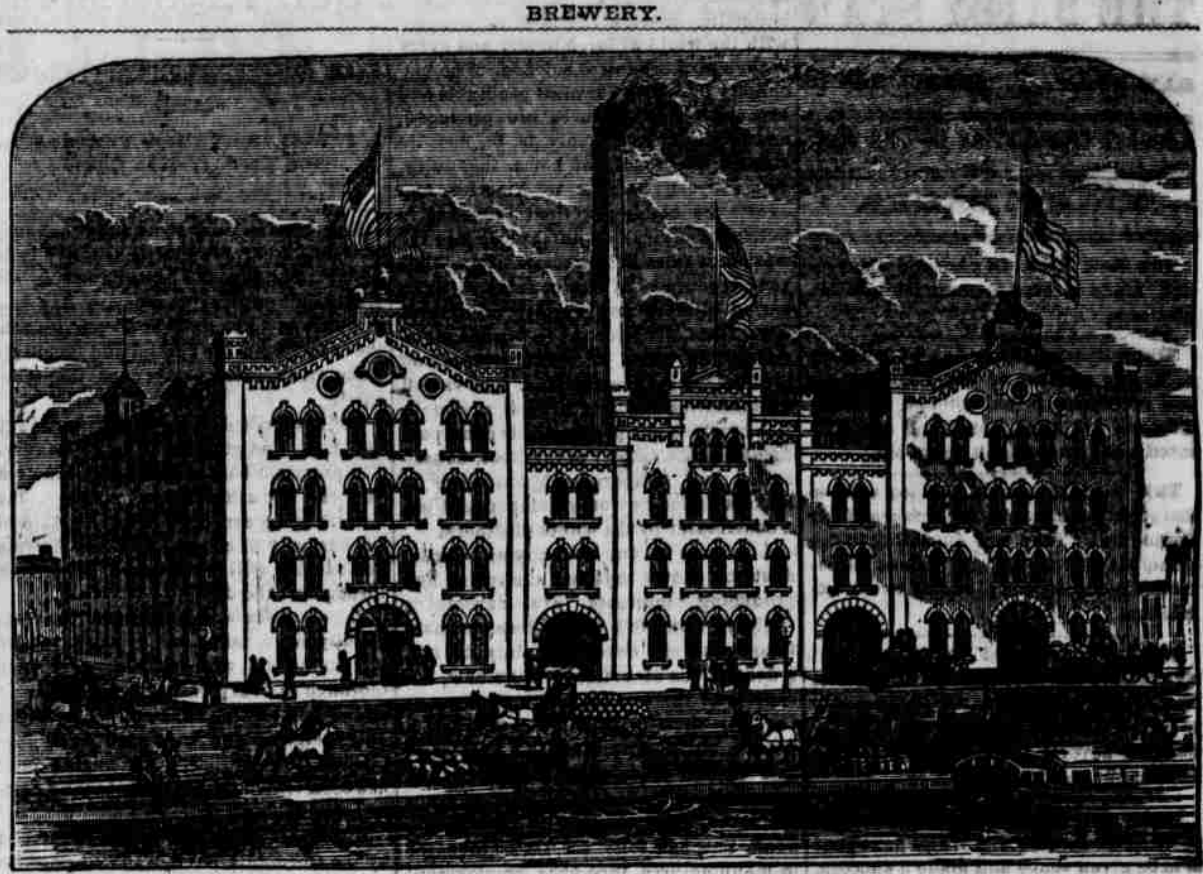
Farming may be done close—less wasted and more made.

When Men are at Their Best.

Dr. Beard states that from an analysis of the lives of a thousand representative men in all the great branches of human effort, he made the discovery that the golden decade was between thirty and forty, the silver, forty and fifty, the brazen between twenty and thirty, the iron between fifty and sixty. The superiority of the middle age is obvious. It is the age in which the man appears at his greatest, when we consider the fact that all the positions of honor and profit and prestige—professorships and public stations—are in the hands of the old. Reputation, like money and position, is mainly confined to the old. Men are not widely known until long after they have done the work which their talents demand. Portraits of great men are a delusion, statues are lies. They are taken when men have become famous, which, on the average, is at least twenty-five years after they did the work which gave them their fame. Original work requires enthusiasm. If all the original work done by men were done by the young, they would be reduced to barbarism. Men are at their best at that time when enthusiasm and experience are most evenly balanced; this period on the average is from thirty-eight to forty. After this the law is that experience increases but enthusiasm decreases. In the life of almost every old man there comes a point, sooner or later, when experience ceases to have any educating power.

Writers and Talkers.

The Baltimore American says: We are apt to imagine that good writers are fluent conversationalists; but this is not always the case. There was Dr. Blair, whose mind was so chained to his pen that he was called "Dr. Speaknothin'." Scott was most genial in conversation, and the pleasant description of the author reading his poems and novels to his family, and their affectionate sympathy, is truly delightful. Dickens, too, was gifted in speech as well as pen, and, perhaps, had he cultivated the home circle with his genius, his married life might have been happier. Coleridge and Wordsworth were both great talkers, and though they professed to delight in each others' society, they always avoided meeting, because neither liked to listen. Contemporary with them was Mr. Talfourd, of whom Miss Mitford says: "His conversation is so glittering, so dazzling, that listening to him is like looking at the sun; it makes one's mind ache with excessive brilliancy." But he did not possess the secret of pleasant conversation, for his talk was more like haranguing. Humorous and witty people are always delightful company, but those who use sarcasm are seldom popular. Some writers say of sarcasm, "It is an easy talent, for the worst wine makes capital vinegar." Poor Goldsmith was often the target for the sarcastic wit of his friends. He once said to Beauclerk, "I am determined to leave off prescribing for friends." "Do so, dear Doctor; whenever you undertake to kill, let it be your enemies," was the reply.



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